



Women's Reality: An Emerging Female System in a White Male Society

Anne Wilson Schaef

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Chapter One Fitting in: The White Male System and Other Systems in Our Culture

The White Male System and the Way the World Isn't

When working with clients, therapists have traditionally taken one of two approaches: the "intrapsychic" or the "interpersonal." In the former, the therapist focuses on what goes on "inside" the person, emphasizing the importance of dreams, fantasies, defense mechanisms, fixations, and the like. Of special significance are the first five years of a client's life; these are seen as having shaped the person and determined what she or he would be and become in the future.

Many practitioners now feel that the intrapsychic approach is sorely lacking. The information gained by that methodology may be useful, but it is just not enough. True, a therapist can work with an individual's insides and make great strides, but it is also necessary to work with her or his "outsides"--specifically, to become aware of and/or involved with the significant others in the client's life. After all, no one lives in a vacuum. The interpersonal approach, then, focuses on the system in which the client lives "and" on the system which is the client herself or himself.

As a practicing psychotherapist, I myself have used both approaches--the intrapsychic and the interpersonal--with my clients, depending on their needs and my perceptions. Both have worked at different times; both have helped people to become living, loving, capable individuals. Still, I have never been entirely satisfied with either approach or the combination of the two. Something is missing from each one--something which I have grown to feel is essential not only to the therapeutic process but also to getting along in the world on a day-to-day basis.

What is missing is an understanding and awareness of what I have chosen to call the White Male System. It is crucial to be able to define this system and deal with it simply because it surrounds us and permeates our lives. Its myths, beliefs, rituals, procedures, and outcomes affect everything we think, feel, and do.

Let me explain what I mean by the White Male System. It is the system in which we live, and in it, the power and influence are held by white males. This system did not happen overnight, nor was it the result of the machinations of only a few individuals; we all not only let it occur but participated in its development. Nevertheless, the White Male System is just that: a system. We all live in it, but it is not reality. It is not the way the world is. Unfortunately, some of us do not recognize that it is a system and think it "is" reality or the way the world is.

The White Male System--and it is important to keep in mind that I am referring to a "system" here and not pointing a finger at specific individuals within it--controls almost every aspect of our culture. It makes our laws, runs our economy, sets our salaries, and decides when and if we will go to war or remain at home. It decides what is knowledge and how it is to be taught. Like any other system, it has both positive and negative qualities. But because it is only a system, it can be clarified, examined, and changed, both from within and without.

There are other systems within our culture. The Black System, the Chicano System, the Asian American

System, and the Native American System are completely enveloped in and frequently overshadowed by the White Male System. As, of course, is the Female System, which includes women from the other ethnic systems as well as white women.

There are a few white men who do not fit into the White Male System. They form a small but growing group which is frequently perceived as a sanctuary by white men who do not want to acknowledge their sexism. Whenever I mention the existence of this group during a lecture, I can almost see the men in the room rushing to crowd into it. If they can just get into that circle, they can be "different" and not have to face themselves. I wait until they are comfortably crowded in before saying, "Of course, at this point in history that group is largely homosexual." They then quickly rush right out again I use this statement for effect, and while it is not necessarily accurate, it "does" encourage men to realize that there is more to sexism than meets the eye. This keeps the focus where it should be and is also an amusing process to observe.

Saying that you are not sexist--or that you do not want to be, or would rather not admit that you are--is not the same as doing something about your sexism. To give a parallel example, this is much like what many of us white liberals did during the civil rights movement. We needed our Black friends to tell us that we were different. We needed to hear that we were not like everyone else, that we were not discriminatory and racist. Once we heard that, we could avoid having to deal with our racism, which was real no matter how hard we tried to ignore it or cover it up.

Before we can deal with our sexism, we must learn to distance ourselves from the White Male System. We must learn to step back, take a long look at it, and see it for what it really is.

Women's Reality: An Emerging Female System in a White Male Society Details

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From Reader Review Women's Reality: An Emerging Female System in a White Male Society for online ebook

Beth says

This book completely changed my perspective on our culture, especially here in the Deep South. It contrasts the White Male System with the Female System, and helps women understand that having a different perspective and method in life is not bad.

Your journey to this book must be gradual. Seeing the White Male System for what it is can be a shock, and you will reject it's reality if you're not ready. Prepare to have revealed the source of your nagging doubts, your negative messages, the little ponderings about your role as a wife, mother or just being a female in our society. Prepare to be freed, as I was. It gave me a choice not to participate, to reject the hold the patriarchal mindset had on my life. It will take some time to purge.

It changed my marriage for the better, revealing the core of what was wrong in our relationship and leaving us both free to pursue our true selves and work together instead of trying to quantify the worth of and work each contributed to our lives.

I appreciate the way Schaef wrote this book. There is no hatred, no animosity. It's laid out very factually and calmly, contrasting both points of view.

Teresa says

In the 80's, I bought multiple copies of this book to hand out to anyone who was interested. I'm reading this book again to see if I still think it rates 5 stars as I did back in the 80's. Anne Wilson Schaef has changed her mind about a lot of ideas that she wrote and has since published many more books. She's a growing, thinking person who changes her mind and sees things more clearly as she goes on in life. (Yea!!)I still think her observations are mostly right on. Its a small book, very succinct,with many good observations about the world we live in and the various cultures (men, women, blacks, native americans,etc) and how they adapt to the dominate culture. She uses a lot of examples of situations and of her experiences which makes it very readable. Some men think its a male bashing book but I don't agree and its certainly not her intention. Well, I've never talked to a guy who has actually read the book, but I did do an oral book report on it in college once and that was the response from the guys. The author emphasizes that she's not placing judgment, just describing the different systems.

Betti says

a friend recommended this to me, quoting its reference to 'levels of truth.' i think that was a convenient scapegoat for that particular friend. in any case, this captures the feel of the 70s for women.

Nicholas Coleman says

Even though this was published 30 years ago it is still very relevant today. Schaefer describes how so many of us see the world through the prism of what she calls the "White Male System" which values competition over cooperation and domination over equality among other misplaced priorities. She then delves into the much more egalitarian and compassionate "Female System" which has existed side by side with the dominant White Male System, but has largely been identified by white males as crazy and wrong. We have made some progress since this book was published but we still have so far to go. The book itself is based on Schaefer's work as a therapist and organizational consultant and compiles her observations on the way women experience life in a system designed primarily by white men. It is concise and very clearly written.

Wendy says

Absolutely a MUST read.

Covenant Presbyterian Springfield Ohio says

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Available.

Shaifali says

While this book had some gems, it was annoying in that Schaefer used certain stereotypes to quell other stereotypes.

The author took for granted that women love a certain way, react a certain way, have a knack of understanding that most men do not, successful careers always drain women and it bores them after years of trying to play by the Male White System (WMS), etc -- without realising that the reason women have all of those experiences and feelings unique to their gender is BECAUSE of the WMS.

She did not care to understand/explain this, going on directly to categorise everything that women usually go through because of the social hierarchy, as a Female System.

She totally ignored the possibility of the idea that women living in the WMS might be inherently similar to a white male in her ideas/interests were they not raised so differently and with different expectations, in the 'pollution', as she calls the System, using an analogy.

This is the problem I have with many books on women, written in the last century, because while they agree that no gender is superior or inferior, they take on the idea that difference in cultures of men and that of women are because of the differences of gender.

For a greater understanding of nuances such as this, I recommend Cordelia Fine's 'Delusions of Gender' which goes in great depth to explain, for ex, why a certain women might do better on 'understanding people', than a certain man.

Bruna Costa says

- Interesting read - a quick read, very academic in nature. Chosen as homework for the ebook I was writing on feminism and women winning. All in all... Never boring. Sometimes kooky (as in the nature of personal opinion that tries to make itself truth.) Very thought provoking and as equally psychological as philosophical.

You'll read it and you will enjoy it.

Marsha says

Wilson-Schaefer originally wrote this book in 1981; the copy I've read is the third edition from 1992. I rarely read psych or feminist theory anymore, and only got into it because my boyfriend thought it to be both interesting and he agreed with most of it, and it might spark some interesting conversation between us. I was curious to see if the conclusions in this book still held up in the second decade of this century.

For the most part, I think that the core concepts in Women's Reality are still solidly accurate. Her description of the white male system and the ways that women relate to it, is fairly spot on. I cannot disagree in the least with her concept of women feeling "innate inferiority," and the breakdown of women's relating and reacting within this societal model. The evaluation of male-female relationships seemed very accurate to me, and while "the perfect marriage" descriptions seem somewhat dated in the examples, the overall description of the rigidity of the relationship and the base inequality of the partnership was something I could agree with (and why I've personally scoffed at the idea of traditional marriage for most of my life).

I had some real issues with some of Wilson-Schaefer's presentation of the female system, and I find it interesting to contemplate whether this is because of my own lifelong indoctrination in the white male system, or because I really think she is off base. Probably the biggest objection I have is her description of the difference that men and women have processing information: "In general, a man takes in information through the sense organs in his head" vs "A woman takes in information through her solar plexus." I really think this section is really weak.

All in all, it's an interesting and informative read which provokes quite a lot of thought.

Kimm says

I registered a book at BookCrossing.com!

<http://www.BookCrossing.com/journal/12741531>

Skyqueen says

Very enlightening! It was a game-changer! It changed my whole perception & world view, and still lurks in the back of my mind in EVERY social situation, personal or worldwide, even 30 years later.
